

Command Authority (A Jack Ryan Novel)

By Tom Clancy, Mark Greaney

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With President Ryan fighting the political battle of his life, and his son fighting a silent war against a ruthless foe, global conflict becomes imminent—and the possibility of survival may soon be lost for all…

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Editorial Review

Review
“Once again, the acrid scent of cordite wafted through my imagination during the climactic gun battle as Clancy’s characters from the world of intelligence achieved yet another victory over the forces of evil.”—*The Washington Times*

“Vintage Clancy…A pleasing fairytale for people who like things that blow up.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author
Thirty years ago **Tom Clancy** was a Maryland insurance broker with a passion for naval history. Years before, he had been an English major at Baltimore’s Loyola College and had always dreamed of writing a novel. His first effort, *The Hunt for Red October*, sold briskly as a result of rave reviews, then catapulted onto the *New York Times* bestseller list after President Reagan pronounced it “the perfect yarn.” From that day forward, Clancy established himself as an undisputed master at blending exceptional realism and authenticity, intricate plotting, and razor-sharp suspense. He passed away in October 2013.

Mark Greaney has a degree in International Relations and Political Science and is pursuing his Masters in Intelligence Studies with a concentration in Criminal Intelligence. He is the author of the Gray Man novels *The Gray Man*, *On Target*, *Ballistic*, and *Dead Eye*. In his research for the Gray Man novels, he travelled to seven countries, and trained alongside military and law enforcement in the use of firearms, battlefield medicine, and close range combat tactics.

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

The flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics flew high above the Kremlin in a rain shower, a red-and-gold banner waving under a gray sky. The young captain took in the imagery from the backseat of the taxi as it rolled through Red Square.

The sight of the flag over the seat of power of the largest country in the world jolted the captain with pride, although Moscow would never feel like home to him. He was Russian, but he’d spent the past several years fighting in Afghanistan, and the only Soviet flags he’d seen there had been on the uniforms of the men around him.

His taxi let him out just two blocks from the square, on the north side of the massive GUM department store. He double-checked the address on the drab office building in front of him, paid his fare, and then stepped out into the afternoon rain.

The building’s lobby was small and plain; a lone security man eyed him as he tucked his hat under his arm and climbed a narrow staircase that led to an unmarked door on the first floor.

Here the captain paused, brushed wrinkles out of his uniform, and ran his hand over his rows of medals to make certain they were perfectly straight.

Only when he was ready did he knock on the door.

"Vkhodi!" Come in!

The young captain entered the small office and shut the door behind him. With his hat in his hand, he stepped in front of the one desk in the room, and he snapped to attention.

"Captain Roman Romanovich Talanov, reporting as ordered."

The man behind the desk looked like he was still in his twenties, which greatly surprised Captain Talanov. He was here to meet a senior officer in the KGB, and he certainly did not expect someone his own age. The man wore a suit and tie, he was small and thin and not particularly fit, and he looked, to the Russian soldier, like he had never spent a day of his life in military service.

Talanov showed no hint of it, of course, but he was disappointed. For him, like every military man, officers in the KGB were divided into two classes. *Sapogi* and *pidzhaki*. Jackboots and jackets. This young man before him might have been a high-ranking state security official, but to the soldier, he was just a civilian. A jacket.

The man stood, walked around the desk, and then sat down on its edge. His slight slouch contrasted with the ramrod-straight posture of the officer standing in front of him.

The KGB man did not give his name. He said, "You just returned from Afghanistan."

"Yes, comrade."

"I won't ask you how it was, because I would not understand, and that would probably just piss you off."

The captain stood still as stone.

The jacket said, "You are GRU Spetsnaz. Special Forces. You've been operating behind the lines in Afghanistan. Even over the border in Pakistan."

It was not a question, so the captain did not reply.

With a smile, the man slouched on the desk said, "Even as a member of the most elite special operations unit in military intelligence, you stand out above the rest. Intelligence, resilience, initiative." He winked at Talanov. "Loyalty."

Talanov's blue eyes were locked on a point on the wall behind the desk, so he missed the wink. With a powerful voice, he replied with a well-practiced mantra: "I serve the Soviet Union."

The jacket half rolled his eyes, but again Talanov missed it. "Relax, Captain. Look at me, not the wall. I am not your commanding officer. I am just a comrade who wishes to have a conversation with another comrade, not a fucking robot."

Talanov did *not* relax, but his eyes did shift to the KGB man.

"You were born in Ukraine. In Kherson, to Russian parents."

“Yes, comrade.”

“I am from Saint Petersburg myself, but I spent my summers with my grandmother in Odessa, not far from where you grew up.”

“Yes, comrade.”

The jacket blew out a sigh, frustrated at the continued formality of the Spetsnaz man. He asked, “Are you proud of those medals on your chest?”

Talanov’s face gave away his first emotion now. It was indecision. “I . . . they are . . . I serve the—”

“You serve the Soviet Union. *Da*, Captain, duly noted. But what if I told you I wanted you to take off those medals and never put them back on?”

“I do not understand, comrade.”

“We have followed your career, especially the operations you have conducted behind the lines. And we have researched every aspect of your private life, what little there is of it. From this we have come to the conclusion that you are less interested in the good of the Communist Party, and more interested in the work itself. You, dear Captain, have a slavish desire to excel. But we do not detect in you any particular passion for the joys of the collective or any unique wonderment at the command economy.”

Talanov remained silent. Was this a test of his loyalty to the party?

The jacket continued. “Chairman Chernenko will be dead in months. Perhaps weeks.”

Captain Talanov blinked. *What madness is this talk?* If someone said such a thing in front of a KGB man on base back in Afghanistan, they would be shuffled away, never to be seen again.

The jacket said, “It’s true. They hide him from the public because he’s in a wheelchair, and he spends most of the time up in Kuntsevo at the Kremlin Clinic. Heart, lungs, liver: Nothing on that old bastard is working anymore. Gorbachev will succeed him as general secretary—surely you’ve heard he’s next in line. Even out in some cave in Afghanistan, that *must* be common knowledge by now.”

The young officer gave up nothing.

“You are wondering how I know this?”

Slowly, Talanov said, “*Da*, comrade. I *am* wondering that.”

“I know this because I have been told by people who are worried. Worried about the future, worried about where Gorbachev will take the Union. Worried about where Reagan is taking the West. Worried everything might come crashing down on top of us.”

There were a few seconds of complete silence in the room, and then the KGB suit said, “Seems impossible, I know. But I am assured there is reason for concern.”

Talanov couldn’t take it anymore. He needed to know what was going on. “I was ordered to come here today by General Zolotov. He told me I was being considered for recruitment into a special project for the KGB.”

“Misha Zolotov knew what he was doing when he sent you to me.”

“You *do* work for the KGB, yes?”

“I do, indeed. But more specifically, I work for a group of survivors. Men in KGB and GRU, men who know that the continued existence of our organizations *is* the survival of the nation, the survival of the people. The Kremlin does not run this nation. A certain building in Dzerzhinsky Square runs this nation.”

“The KGB building?”

“*Da.* And I have been tasked with protecting this building, not the Communist Party.”

“And General Zolotov?”

The jacket smiled. “Is in the club. As I said, a few in GRU are on board.”

The man in the suit came very close now, his face inches from the chiseled cheekbones of Roman Talanov. In a voice barely above a whisper he said, “If I were you I would be saying to myself, ‘What the fuck is going on? I thought I was being recruited into the KGB, but instead I’ve just met a crazy man talking about the impending death of the general secretary and the possibility of the fall of the Union.’”

Talanov turned to face him and squared his shoulders. “Every word you’ve said here, comrade, is treasonous.”

“That is true, but as there are no recording devices in this room, it would take you to stand up as a witness against me. That would not be wise, Captain Talanov, as those survivors that I mentioned are at the very top, and they would protect me. What they would do to you, I can only imagine.”

Talanov looked back to the wall. “So . . . I am being asked to join the KGB, but not to do the work of the KGB. I will, instead, do the work of this group of leaders.”

“That’s it, exactly, Roman Romanovich.”

“What will I be doing specifically?”

“The same sort of things you have been doing in Kabul and Peshawar and Kandahar and Islamabad.”

“Wet work?”

“Yes. You will help ensure the security of the operation, despite what changes the Soviet Union undergoes in the next few years. In return, you will be protected no matter what might happen in the future regarding the Union.”

“I . . . I still do not understand what you think will happen in the future.”

“Are you listening to me? It’s not what *I* think. How the fuck should *I* know? It’s like this, Talanov. The USSR is a large boat, you and I are two of the passengers. We are sitting on the deck, thinking everything is just perfect, but then”—the KGB man moved around the room dramatically, as though he was acting out a scene—“wait . . . what’s this? Some of the boat’s best officers are preparing to abandon ship!”

He moved back in front of Talanov. “I might not see the iceberg in our path, but when those in charge are looking for the *fucking* lifeboat, I’m smart enough to pay attention.

“Now . . . I have been asked to tend to the lifeboat, a great responsibility entrusted to me by the officers.”

The jacket grinned. “Will you help me with the lifeboat?”

Captain Talanov was a straightforward man. The metaphors were starting to piss him off. “The lifeboat. What *is* it?”

The jacket shrugged his narrow shoulders. “It’s money. It’s just fucking money. A series of black funds will be established and maintained around the world. I will do it, and you will help me keep the funds secure from threats both inside and outside the Union. It will be a simple assignment, a few years in duration, I should think, but it will require the best efforts of us both.”

The man in the suit walked to a small refrigerator that sat against the wall between two bookshelves. He pulled out a bottle of vodka, and then he grabbed two stemmed shot glasses from a shelf. He came back to the desk and filled them both.

While he did all this, Captain Roman Talanov just looked on.

“Let’s have a drink to celebrate.”

Talanov cocked his head. “Celebrate? I haven’t agreed to anything, comrade.”

“No. You haven’t.” The man in the suit smiled and passed over one of the glasses to the bewildered military man. “Not yet. But you will come around soon enough, because you and I are the same.”

“The same?”

The jacket raised his glass to Talanov. “Yes. Just like the men at the top who came up with this scheme, you and I are both survivors.”

1

Present day

The black Bronco shot through the storm, its tires kicking up mud and water and grit as it raced along the gravel road, and rain pelted the windshield faster than the wipers could clear it.

As the truck charged along at sixty miles an hour, the back doors opened and two armed men climbed out and into the rain, one on each side. The men stood on the running boards and held on to the door frame with gloved hands. Their eyes were protected from the mud and flying rocks and water by large goggles, but their black Nomex suits and the submachine guns around their necks were wet and mud-splattered in moments along with the rest of their gear: helmets with integrated headsets, ballistic protection on their chests and backs, knee and elbow pads, and magazine pouches. Everything was soaked and caked with mud by the time the Bronco closed on a cabin in the center of a rain-swept pasture.

The vehicle decelerated quickly, skidding to a stop just twenty feet from the front door. The two men on the running boards leapt off and raced toward the building, their weapons scanning the trees all around, searching for any targets. The driver of the Bronco joined soon after; just like the others, he carried an H&K submachine gun with a fat silencer on the end of the barrel.

The three operators formed in a tight stack near the entrance, and the man in front reached forward and tried the door latch.

It was locked.

The man in the back of the stack—the driver—stepped forward now, without a word. He let his H&K drop free on his chest, and he reached behind his back and pulled a pistol-grip shotgun from his pack. The weapon was loaded with Disintegrator breaching rounds: three-inch magnum shells with fifty-gram projectiles made of a steel powder bound by plastic.

The operator placed the barrel of the shotgun six inches from the top hinge of the door, and he fired a Disintegrator directly into the hinge. With an enormous boom and a wide blast of flame, the steel powder load slammed into the wood, blowing the hinge from the door frame.

He fired a second round into the lower hinge, then kicked the door, which fell into the room beyond.

The shotgunner stepped to the side and the two men holding automatic weapons rushed into the dark room, guns up and weapon lights burning arcs in the black. The driver restowed his shotgun, grabbed his H&K, and joined up with the others in the room.

Each man had a sector to clear and did so quickly and efficiently. In three seconds they began moving toward a hallway that led to the rear of the cabin.

Two open doorways were in front of them now, one on each side of the hall, with a closed door down at the end. The first and second men in the train peeled away; number one went left through the doorway, and number two went into the room on the right. Both men found targets and fired; suppressed rounds thumped loudly in the confined space of the cabin.

While the first two men were engaging in the rooms, the lone man still in the hallway kept his weapon trained on the door ahead, knowing full well he would be exposed from behind if anyone entered the cabin from the outside.

Quickly the two men returned to the hallway and aimed their guns forward, and the man at the rear turned around to check behind them. A second later they moved on to the closed door. They stacked up again, and the first man quietly checked the latch.

It was unlocked, so he paused only long enough to lower his body a few inches while his mates did the same. Then the three men moved in as a team, and the lights under the three guns swept their sectors.

They found their precious cargo in the center of the unlit space. John Clark sat in a chair, his hands in his lap, squinting straight into the bright lights. Inches from him on both his left and his right, the tactical lights illuminated two figures standing, and a partial face of a third man was just visible behind Clark’s own head.

The three gunmen in the doorway—Domingo Chavez, Sam Driscoll, and Dominic Caruso—all fired simultaneously. Short bursts from their weapons cracked in the room, flashes erupted from their muzzles, and the scent of gun smoke replaced the dank smell of mold in the cabin.

John Clark did not move, did not even blink, as the bullets slammed into the three figures around him.

Holes appeared in the foreheads of the targets, but the figures did not fall. They were wooden stands, upon which photorealistic images of armed men had been attached.

Quickly the tactical lights scanned the rest of the room independently, and one of them centered on fourth and fifth figures, positioned next to each other in a far corner. The wooden target on the left was the image of a man with a detonator in his hand.

Ding Chavez double-tapped this target in the forehead.

A second light swept to the corner and illuminated the image of a beautiful young woman holding an infant in her right arm. In her left hand, low and partially hidden behind her leg, she held a long kitchen knife.

Without a moment's hesitation, Dom Caruso shot the female target in the forehead.

Seconds later a call came from across the room. "Clear," Driscoll said.

"Clear," Caruso repeated.

"We're clear," Ding confirmed.

John Clark stood up from his chair in the center of the room, rubbing his eyes after catching the full intensity of three 200-lumen tactical lights. "Make your weapons safe."

Each of the three operators thumbed the safety of his MP5 on and let his weapon hang freely from his chest.

Together the four men surveyed the holes in the five targets and then headed outside the room and checked the targets in the rooms off the hall. They stepped outside of the dark cabin, where they stood together on the porch to stay out of the rain.

"Thoughts, Ding?" Clark asked.

Chavez said, "It was fair. It slowed things down when I had to catch up to the guys so we could stack up at the door. But any way we roll this, if we want to breach with at least three operators, we're going to have to wait on the driver."

Clark conceded the point. "That's true. What else?"

Caruso said, "When Ding and Sam engaged in the rooms off the hall, I was on my own. I covered the space we hadn't cleared yet, which was the doorway at the end of the hall, but I couldn't help thinking it would have been nice to have one more man to check six. Any hostiles who entered from the outside would have had an open shot at the back of my head. I kept my head on a swivel, but it's not the same as having another gun in the fight."

Clark nodded. "We are a small force."

"Smaller now without Jack Junior," Dom Caruso added.

Driscoll said, "We might want to think about bringing someone new into the unit."

"Jack will be back," Chavez replied. "You know as well as I do that as soon as we reactivate he won't be able to stay away."

"Maybe so," said Dom. "But who knows when that will happen."

Clark said, "Be patient, kid," but it was clear to the others on the porch that Clark himself was champing at the bit to do something more impactful with his time. He was a warrior, he'd been in the middle of most every conflict the United States had been involved in for more than forty years, and although he'd retired from active operations with The Campus, he was clearly ready to do more than train.

Clark looked out off the porch at the Bronco now; its doors were wide open, and the storm had only increased in intensity. By now the floorboards would have an inch of standing water, and the torn fabric upholstery would be waterlogged. “Glad I told you to use the farm truck.”

Ding said, “It needed a good interior detailing.”

The men laughed.

“All right. Back to work,” Clark said. “You guys head back up the road, wait twenty minutes, and then try again. That will give me time to rehang the front door and move the configuration around. Dom, your grouping on the second target in the bedroom could have been a little tighter.”

“Roger that,” Dom said. He’d fired his MP5 three times at target two, and all three rounds had struck the target’s head within two and a half inches of one another, but he wasn’t going to argue the point with Clark. Especially since all of Driscoll’s and Chavez’s targets had sub-two-inch groupings.

“And Sam,” Clark said. “I’d like to see you breach the door a little lower. If you can get your head down another three inches as you enter, it could mean the difference between catching a round to the forehead and just getting a haircut.”

“Will do, Mr. C.”

Dom started to head off the porch, but he looked out at the weather. “No chance we are going to wait for the rain to stop before trying this again?”

Ding walked straight out into the mud and stood under the heavy downpour. “I had a drill instructor back at Fort Ord, an Alabama redneck but a hell of a DI, who liked to say, ‘If it ain’t rainin’, you ain’t trainin’.’”

Clark and Dom laughed, and even Sam Driscoll, the quietest of the bunch, cracked a smile.

2

The Russian Federation invaded its sovereign neighbor on the first moonless night of spring. By dawn their tanks ground westward along highways and back roads as if the countryside belonged to them, as if the quarter-century thaw from the Cold War had been a dream.

This was not supposed to happen here. This was Estonia, after all, and Estonia was a NATO member state. The politicians in Tallinn had promised their people that Russia would never attack them now that they had joined the alliance.

But so far, NATO was a no-show in this war.

The Russian ground invasion was led by T-90s—fully modernized fifty-ton tanks with a 125-millimeter main gun and two heavy machine guns, explosive-reactive armor, and a state-of-the-art automated countermeasure system that detected inbound missiles and then launched missiles of its own to kill them in midair. And behind the T-90 warhorses, BTR-80 armored transporters carried troops in their bellies, disgorging them when necessary to provide cover for the tanks, and then retrieving them when all threats had been neutralized.

So far, the land war was proceeding nominally for the Russian Federation.

But it was a different story in the air.

Estonia had a good missile defense system, and Russia's attack on their early-warning systems and SAM sites had been only marginally successful. Many SAM batteries were still operational, and they had shot down more than a dozen Russian aircraft and kept dozens of others from executing their missions over the nation.

The Russians did not yet own the skies, but this had not slowed down their land advance at all.

In the first four hours of the war, villages were flattened, towns lay in rubble, and many of the tanks had yet to fire their main guns. It was a rout in the making, and anyone who knew anything about military science could have seen it coming, because the tiny nation of Estonia had focused on diplomacy, not on its physical defense.

Edgar Nõlvak had seen it coming, not because he was a soldier or a politician—he was a schoolteacher—but he had seen it coming because he watched television. Now as he lay in a ditch, bloody and cold, wet and shaking from fear, his ears half destroyed from the sustained crashing of detonating shells fired from the Russian tanks poking out of the tree line on the far side of the field, he retained the presence of mind to wish like hell his country's leaders had not wasted time with diplomacy in Brussels, and had instead spent their time constructing a *fucking* wall to keep the *fucking* Russians out of his *fucking* village.

There had been talk of an invasion for weeks, and then, days earlier, a bomb exploded over the border in Russia, killing eighteen civilians. On the television the Russians blamed the Estonian Internal Security Service, a preposterous claim given credence by Russia's slick and state-sponsored media. They showed their manufactured proof and then the Russian president said he had no choice but to order a security operation into Estonia to protect the Russian people.

Edgar Nõlvak lived in Põlva; it was forty kilometers from the border, and he'd spent his youth in the seventies and eighties fearing that someday tanks would appear in that very tree line and shell his home. But over the past twenty-three years that fear had been all but forgotten.

Now the tanks were here, they'd killed scores of his fellow townspeople, and they would surely kill him with barely a pause on their way west.

Edgar had gotten a call two hours earlier from a friend who lived in Võuküla, several kilometers to the east. His friend was hiding in the woods, and in a voice flat and detached from shock he told Edgar the Russian tanks had rolled on past his village after firing only a few shells, as there was nothing in Võuküla except for some farmhouses and a gas station. But behind the tanks and the soldiers in the armored personnel carriers, just minutes behind them, in fact, a force of irregulars came in pickup trucks, and they were now systematically burning and pillaging the town.

At that moment Edgar and the other men with him here sent their families away, and then, bravely or foolishly, they'd taken their rifles into the ditch to wait for the armor to pass and for the irregulars to appear. They could do nothing to stop the tanks, but they would not let their village be burned to the ground by Russian *civilians*.

This plan evaporated the instant a half-dozen tanks broke off the main force moving up the highway, formed a picket line in the trees, and then began pounding Põlva with high-explosive rounds.

This was Edgar's childhood nightmare come to life.

Edgar and the men with him had vowed to fight to the death. But then the tanks came; this was no fight.

This was just death.

The schoolteacher had been wounded almost immediately. As he moved from one position to another he'd been caught in the open as a round hit the high school's parking lot. Shrapnel from an exploding station wagon had sliced through his legs, and now he lay in the mud on his rifle, waiting for the end.

Edgar Nõlvak did not know much about military things, but he was sure that at the pace they were moving, the Russians would be in the city of Tartu, to the north of his village, by midafternoon.

A sound like paper tearing filled the air. He'd been listening to this sound for an hour, and he knew it meant incoming fire. He pressed his face back into the cold mud.

Boom!

Behind him, a direct hit on the gymnasium of the high school. The aluminum-and-cinder-block walls blew out ahead of a billowing cloud; the wood flooring of the basketball court rained down in splinters over Edgar.

He looked again over the edge of the ditch. The tanks were only a thousand meters to the east.

"Where the *fuck* is NATO?"

—

One thousand meters away, Captain Arkady Lapranov stood in the open hatch of his tank, Storm Zero One, and shouted, "Where the *fuck* is my air cover?"

It was a rhetorical question; the commanders of the five other tanks he controlled heard it but did not respond, and the two men in his vehicle, the driver and the gunner, waited silently for orders. They knew there were helicopter gunships they could call forward if any air threats appeared, but so far they'd seen no sign of Estonian aircraft, nor had the Russian airborne warning and control system detected any aircraft in the area on radar.

The skies were clear.

This was a good day. A tanker's dream.

A thousand meters away the cloud of dust and smoke over the gymnasium settled enough so that Lapranov could see behind it. Into his mike he said, "I want more rounds in that building beyond the previous target. HE-FRAG. Without proper air support I am not moving forward on that road until I can see what's to the right of the intersection."

"Yes, sir!" Lapranov's gunner shouted from below.

The gunner pressed a button, and the autoloader computer chose a high-explosive-fragmentation round from the magazine, and its mechanical arm chambered it. The gunner used his video-viewing device to find the building, then put his forehead against the rubber pad on the sight panel and aimed his crosshairs on target. He pushed the fire button on the control panel, and then, with a violent lurch, the 125-millimeter smoothbore gun launched a shell through the blue sky, across the fallow field in front of them, and directly into the building.

“Hit,” said the gunner.

They had been proceeding like this all morning. So far they had moved through four villages, shelling big targets with their 125-millimeter gun and raking small targets with their coaxial machine guns.

Lapranov had expected more resistance, but he was starting to allow for the fact that Russia’s president, Valeri Volodin, had been right. Volodin had told his nation NATO would have no stomach to fight for Estonia.

In his headset, Lapranov heard a transmission from one of the tanks under his command.

“Storm Zero Four to Storm Zero One.”

“Go, Zero Four.”

“Captain, I have movement in a ditch in front of the last target. Range one thousand. I see multiple dismounts.”

Lapranov looked through his binoculars, scanning slowly across the ditch.

There. Heads popped up out of the mud, then disappeared again. “I see them. Small-arms position. Don’t waste a one-twenty-five. We’ll clean them up with the coax when we get closer.”

“Roger.”

Another salvo was fired into the buildings on a low hill beyond the intersection, and Lapranov scanned through his optics. The town was deathly quiet; there was virtually no resistance.

“Keep firing,” he ordered, then he knelt back down into his commander’s station to get a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. “Wipe this place off the map.”

Seconds later, another transmission came through his headset: “Storm Zero Two to Storm Zero One.”

“Go,” Lapranov said as he lit his smoke.

“Movement to the south of the hospital. I . . . I think it is a vehicle.”

Lapranov dropped his lighter back inside and looked through his binoculars. It took a moment to find the area; the hospital was a few kilometers beyond the high school, on a small hill. But he scanned to the south of the building and finally he saw the movement on the road in the shadows.

At first he thought he was looking at a jeep, or maybe an SUV.

Another T-90 called in. “Storm Three to Storm One. I think it’s a helicopter.”

“Nyet,” said Lapranov, but he looked closer. The dark vehicle seemed to stop at an intersection, then began moving laterally into a parking lot.

“What the *fuck*?” Lapranov said. “Maybe it is a helo. Gunner, can you ID it through your Catherine?” The Catherine long-range fire-control thermal imager built into each tank allowed the gunner to see distant targets on a video screen. Lapranov himself had access to a Catherine screen, but he’d have to sit down inside the turret for that, and he was having too much fun up here.

The gunner came over Storm Zero One's intercom. "Confirmed light helicopter. Single rotor. Can't make out markings—he is behind a truck in the shade. Shit, he is low. His skids must be just a meter aboveground."

"Armament?" Lapranov asked. He squinted into his binoculars to get a better view himself.

"Um . . . wait. He has twin pylons with machine guns. No missiles." The gunner chuckled. "This guy wants to come out and play against us with his pop guns?"

Lapranov heard a commander of one of the other tanks on the net laughing.

But the captain did not laugh. He took a long drag on his cigarette. "Designate it as a target."

"Roger. Designated as a target."

"Range to target?"

"Four thousand two hundred fifty meters."

"Shit," Lapranov said.

The effective range of the 9M119 Refleks missile system, used against tanks as well as low and slow aircraft like helicopters, was four thousand meters. This small helo hovered just out of range.

"Where is my air support? They should have seen this fucker on radar."

"They won't see his signature. He's moving between the buildings. Too low to the ground. He must have flown over the hill through the entire town like that to stay off radar. Whatever the hell he's doing, he's a good pilot."

"Well, I don't like him. I want him dead. Call in some support. Pass on his coordinates."

"*Da*, Captain."

"All Storm units, load HE-FRAG and resume the attack."

"Da!"

Within seconds, all six tanks fired 125-millimeter main gun rounds into the buildings at the center of Põlva, killing four and injuring nineteen with this single salvo.

3

Edgar Nõlvak heard the shells tear through the sky overhead, and he looked back over his shoulder in time to see them impact against the city hall and the bus station. When the smoke cleared, he noticed a vehicle moving along a road, higher on the hillside. At first he thought it was a black or green SUV; it even seemed to stop in a parking lot. It was difficult to see because it was shaded by the big hospital building next to it, but eventually Edgar realized what it was.

It was a black helicopter. Its skids were no more than one or two meters above the ground.

The man lying next to him in the mud grabbed Edgar by the arm. He pointed at the helicopter and shouted

hysterically. “They are behind us! They are attacking from the west!”

Edgar stared at the helicopter, unsure. Finally he said, “It’s not Russian. I think it is a news helicopter.”

“They are *filming* this? They are just going to watch us die?”

Edgar looked back to the tanks as another shell came crashing down, hitting just sixty meters from the ditch where he lay. Mud rained down on him and the others. “They are going to die themselves if they don’t get the hell out of here.”

—

Lapranov was enjoying his cigarette. As he took a long drag, a transmission came through on the net. “Storm Zero Four to Storm Zero One.”

“Go, Four.”

“Sir, looking at that helo again on the Catherine . . . there seems to be some sort of a pod above the main rotor.”

“A what?”

“A pod, sir.”

Upon hearing the last transmission, Lapranov dropped down into the commander’s compartment and looked at his own Catherine long-range monitor. He could see the helo better now. Yes. There was a round device on top of the main rotor shaft of the little aircraft.

“What the hell is—”

The cigarette fell from his mouth.

Oh, shit.

Lapranov had studied the silhouette of every aircraft flown by every NATO force. Softly, he said, “That’s . . . that’s an OH-58.”

The driver in Storm Zero One came over the net. “Negative, sir. The Estonians don’t have—”

Lapranov shouted into his mike now as he launched upward, frantically grabbing at the hatch handle so he could pull his turret hatch shut. “It’s the *fucking* Americans!”

—

Chief Warrant Officer Two, Eric Conway, U.S. Army, Bravo Troop, 2nd Squad, 17th Cavalry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, glanced down at his multifunction display and looked at the thermal image of Russian tanks in the trees more than two miles away. Then he returned his attention to his blades above. The tips of the four main rotor blades of the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior spun perilously close to the walls of buildings on either side of the street. If he did not hold his cyclic perfectly steady he would strike one of the buildings and send his helo spinning and crashing, and his own poor flying would kill him and his copilot even before the Russian tanks got their chance.

Satisfied he was steady, he blew out a long breath to calm himself, then spoke through his intercom. “You ready, dude?”

His copilot, CW2 Andre Page, replied calmly, “’Bout as ready as I’m gonna get.”

Conway nodded, then said, “Lase target.”

“Roger. Spot on.”

Quickly Conway keyed his mike to broadcast on the fires net. “Blue Max Six Six, Black Wolf Two Six. Target lased.”

—

Four full miles beyond the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior, hidden behind the relative safety of a forested hill, two massive Apache Longbow attack helicopters hovered low over a pasture just north of the village of Aarna. The flight leader, Blue Max Six Six, received the transmission from the scout helo at the same time his copilot/gunner, seated in front of and below him, saw the laser spot tracker on his multifunction display indicating a laser fix on the first target, several miles away.

“Roger, Black Wolf Two Six. Good laser. Stand by for remote Hellfire mission.”

—

The Kiowa Warrior scout helo hovering over the town of Põlva was not heavily armed. But its power was not in its onboard stores; rather, its power came from its ability to find and fix targets for the big Apache gunships behind it. This was VCAS, very close air support, and CW2 Conway and his copilot had taxed their skills to the limit by, essentially, driving their helo through the village to stay off enemy radar so they could get into position to scout for the Apaches.

“Roger, Blue Max Six Six. We’re gonna need to hurry this up. We are out in the open.”

—

In the tree line, the commander of the tank on the northern flank of Lapranov’s squadron shouted into his microphone: “Storm Zero One, this is Storm Zero Six. Laser warning!”

“Shit!” Lapranov muttered into his headset. The little helicopter in the distance may not have been armed with missiles of its own, but it was, apparently, designating targets for some unseen aircraft.

“Arena systems on!” he commanded.

The T-90’s Arena countermeasure system used Doppler radar to detect an inbound threat to the tank. As soon as the attacking projectile was within range, the Arena-equipped tank would fire a defensive rocket designed to close to within two meters of the missile before exploding, destroying the threat.

Lapranov next said, “This helo is spotting for Apaches or jets. Where is my air cover?”

The commander of Storm Zero Five answered back: “Inbound in ten minutes.”

Lapranov slammed his fist into the wall of his commander’s console. “All tankers, load Refleks.”

The 9M119 Refleks guided missile round was designed to fire from the main gun, then "grow" fins and race toward its target. It would take the six gunners upward of thirty seconds to unload the high-explosive shell already chambered in the main gun and then have the autoloader replace it with a Refleks.

Storm Zero Two said, "Target is beyond effective range, sir."

Lapranov shouted, "Just do it, damn you!" He hoped like hell firing all six missiles at the little Kiowa Warrior on the hill would force the American chopper to break its laser targeting sequence long enough for the Storm tanks to get back into the cover of the forest.

—

Four miles due west, hovering north of the village of Aarna, the two Apache Longbows each carried eight Hellfire missiles. On command from the flight lead, both gunners launched. As the Hellfires flashed through the blue sky toward an unseen target in the east, the Apache lead transmitted to the scout helo in Põlva.

"Be advised, Black Wolf Two Six. Multiple Hellfires off the rails and inbound, target Alpha."

—

In Storm Zero One, Captain Arkady Lapranov saw the streaking blip on his Catherine. He knew it was heading to Zero Six, as that was the tank whose laser indicator alarm had sounded.

The first Hellfire missile appeared above the hill as a tiny quivering spark of light. On the backdrop of blue sky, there was no perspective to show it was approaching for several seconds, but then it angled down toward the tree line.

Storm Zero Six's automatic Arena system saw the incoming Hellfire missile, and it launched a rocket to defend itself from it. Fifty meters from impacting the tank, the Hellfire exploded, sending metallic shrapnel all through the trees.

The Arena worked once, but the second inbound Hellfire came too quickly behind, before the Arena could reset and reacquire the new target. The missile slammed into Storm Zero Six's turret before the system could launch another defensive rocket.

Lapranov was inside the commander's station of his tank with his hatch closed, and Zero Six was one hundred twenty meters to the north of him, but still the explosion sent pieces of metal pinging off the hull of his tank.

A second tank, Storm Zero Two, fired two Arena defensive rounds a moment later, and it managed to survive two inbound Hellfires. As the second missile was destroyed in front of Zero Two, Storm Zero Five announced it was now being painted by a laser beam.

Zero Five disintegrated a moment later.

Lapranov gave up on the Refleks missiles; the four remaining tanks' autoloaders were still in the process of selecting the right projectile from the magazine.

Lapranov shouted, "Fire smoke and disengage!" to all Storm units, and then in his own intercom, "Driver, get us out of here! Back! Back! Back!"

"*Da*, Captain!"

—

In the Kiowa Warrior hovering four feet above the ground in Põlva, Eric Conway and Andre Page watched while the four remaining tanks began pulling back away from the town, trying to get into the cover of the trees. A dozen huge bursts of white smoke all around them shrouded them in a puffy cloud.

Page said, “They’re popping smoke and bugging out.”

Conway spoke calmly into his mike: “Change polarity.”

“Roger,” answered Page, and he switched his thermal imaging system from white hot to black hot.

On the screen in front of them, the four tanks hiding in the wide cloud suddenly appeared as plain as day.

In Conway’s headset he heard, “Black Wolf Two Six, be advised, two more missiles away.”

“Keep sending ’em,” Conway said.

While Page pointed his laser on the fourth tank from his left, Conway moved his attention back to his rotor blades. He’d come left a little; the tips were only six feet from impacting the second floor of the hospital. He checked the right side quickly, saw he had a little more clearance over there, so he smoothly rocked the cyclic to his right and recentered his helicopter in the parking lot.

In the trees one of the T-90s’ countermeasure systems fired, and small explosions flashed on the TIS image. They were nothing, however, compared with the massive detonation of the fifty-ton tank that happened a second later when the trailing Hellfire slammed into its turret from above.

“Good hit, Blue Max. Target destroyed. New target lased.”

“Roger, Black Wolf Two Six. Firing . . . missiles off the rails and inbound.”

—

Lapranov’s Storm Zero One was twenty-five meters back in the trees when the tank’s laser warning indicator sounded. He screamed for the driver to get them deeper in the woods, and the T-90 shredded a path through the pines as it tried to retreat.

Moments later, Zero One’s own automatic countermeasure system fired. The captain could do nothing but grab on to the handholds above him and shut his eyes.

The moment of panic and sheer terror experienced by Arkady Lapranov did not translate to any empathy for the men and women in the homes he had blown apart throughout the morning. He cowered in his commander’s control center and hoped like hell the Arena would save him.

His countermeasures saved him twice, but a third missile broke through, slammed into the Kontakt-5 explosive-reactive armor, triggering a detonation on the skin designed to blunt the incoming round’s power, but the Hellfire tore into the steel of the fifty-ton tank like a bullet through flesh. The three men inside died microseconds after the Hellfire warhead’s detonation, the turret of the T-90 fired one hundred fifty feet straight up, and the vehicle itself was knocked back like a plastic toy slammed on a concrete driveway. It exploded, pieces of armor ripped through the forest, and secondary explosives sent flames and black smoke billowing into the cold sky.

—

A minute later CW2 Eric Conway transmitted his battle damage assessment over the fires net. “Blue Max Six Six, Black Wolf Two Six. Good hit. I see no further targets.”

From behind him, the Apache Longbow lead said, “Roger, we are RTB.”

Conway held his gloved fist high, and Page bumped it with his own fist, and then Black Wolf Two Six banked to the north and began both climbing and rotating at the same time. It picked up horizontal speed and shot over the four-story hospital on its way back to base.

—

In the ditch a kilometer or so to the east, Edgar Nõlvak had risen to a sitting position so he could get a better look at the six smoldering tanks in the tree line.

There was no cheering or celebration in the mud. The men here only half understood what had just happened, and they had no way of knowing if the next wave of Russian war machines was even now rolling through the forest. Still, they took advantage of the end of the attack. Some ran to their cars to bring them closer, while others dragged the injured out of the ditch and toward the parking lot so they could be transported to the hospital in the civilian vehicles.

Rough, unsure hands grabbed Edgar Nõlvak and pulled him along. He slid through the mud, wincing with the pain in his legs that was only now becoming apparent, and he said a silent prayer for his village, for his country, and for the world, because he had the feeling he was witness today to the beginning of something very bad.

—

The battle of Põlva was recorded as the first engagement between NATO and Russia, but by late afternoon a dozen such incidents had taken place throughout eastern Estonia.

Russia’s war plan had hinged on NATO remaining unwilling or unable to support its member state. Russia’s gamble had failed, and it withdrew from Estonia the next day, claiming the entire exercise as a success: The country’s only intention had been to root out terrorists in some villages along the border, and this had been achieved.

Everyone in the West knew, however, that Russia had wanted to drive all the way to Tallinn, and its failure to do so was nothing less than a total defeat for Valeri Volodin. It was clear to all, probably even to Volodin himself, that he had underestimated the resolve of NATO in general, and the USA in particular.

But while the celebrations in the West erupted with the Russian withdrawal, officials in the Kremlin were already moving on past this setback and working on a new plan to move its power to the West.

And this plan would be sure to take into account the danger posed by the United States.

4

Two attractive twenty-somethings sat at a table in the center of the pub. This was like most Wednesday nights for Emily and Yalda; they drank their ales and they complained about their jobs at the Bank of

England. It was nearly eleven p.m., and the bulk of the after-work crowd was long gone, but the two women always worked late on Wednesdays, putting together reports that were both tedious and stressful. To reward themselves for their efforts, they had developed the habit of popping in here at the Counting House pub for dinner, drinks, and gossip, before heading to the Tube and their flats in the East End.

They'd been keeping up this ritual for a year, and by now they knew all the regulars at the Counting House, if not by name, at least by sight.

This was The City of London, London's financial center. Virtually all of the men and women who frequented the establishment were regulars who came from the trading houses, banks, investment firms, and the stock exchange, all located in this section of town. Of course, there were strangers in and out each Wednesday, but rarely anyone who generated much interest.

Tonight, however, there was a new face in the crowd, and Emily and Yalda's work talk trailed off quickly as soon as they saw him walk through the door.

He was a tall man in his late twenties or early thirties, in a stylish gray suit that said money and class, and even the conservative cut of his jacket could not hide the physicality of his body underneath.

He was alone, and he found a booth in the corner of the bar area, unscrewed the tiny tealight bulb on the table, and sat down in the low light. When the waitress came by a moment later he ordered, and soon a pint of lager was delivered to him. He looked at his beer while he drank it, checked his phone a couple of times, but otherwise he seemed lost in deep thought.

His disinterest and brooding appearance only increased his stock with Emily and Yalda, who watched him from across the room.

By the time he started on his second pint, the two women from the Bank of England were halfway through their third. They were no shrinking violets; usually they were up off their chairs immediately when they saw a good-looking chap in the pub unencumbered by either a date or a wedding ring, but neither Emily, a redhead from Fulham, nor Yalda, a brunette of Pakistani descent who had been born and raised in Ipswich, moved in the direction of the tall man in the corner. Though he did not look angry or cruel, there were no cues in his body language that gave any indication of approachability.

As the evening wore on it became something of a challenge between the two of them; they giggled as each tried to cajole the other into making a move. Finally Emily ordered a shot of Jägermeister for liquid courage and drank it down in one long gulp. After giving the liquor only a few seconds to kick in, she stood up and made her way across the room.

—

Jack Ryan, Jr., saw the redhead coming from twenty paces. *Shit,* he mumbled to himself. *I'm not in the mood.*

He looked into the golden lager in front of him, willing the woman to lose her nerve before she arrived at his table.

"Hello there."

Jack was greatly disappointed in his powers of psychic suggestion.

She said, "I thought I'd come and check on ya. You fancy a fresh drink? Or how 'bout a fresh lightbulb?"

Jack looked up at her without making much eye contact. He smiled a little, doing his best to be polite without appearing overly friendly. “How are you tonight?”

Emily’s eyes widened. “An American? I knew I hadn’t seen you before. My friend and I were trying to guess your story.”

Jack looked back to his beer. He knew he should feel flattered, but he did not. “Not much of a story, really. I’m here working in The City for a few months.”

She extended a hand. “Emily. Pleased to meet you.”

Jack looked into her eyes for a quick moment, and determined her to be not quite inebriated, but not terribly far from it.

He shook her hand. “I’m John.”

Emily brushed her hair back over her shoulder. “I love America. Went over last year with my ex. Not ex-husband, no, nothing like that, just a bloke I dated for a while, before I realized what a narcissistic sod he was. A right bastard. Anyway, got a holiday out of him, at least, so he was good for something.”

“That’s nice.”

“Which one of the states do you call home?”

“Maryland,” he said.

She looked deeply into his eyes while she talked. Jack saw immediately that she registered a faint sense of recognition, and she was confused by this. She recovered and said, “That’s East Coast, right? Near Washington, D.C. Haven’t been to the East Coast. Me and my ex did the West Coast, quite loved San Francisco, but the traffic down in L.A. was bloody awful. Never did quite get used to driving on the right side of the—”

Emily’s eyes widened suddenly, and she stopped talking.

Shit, Jack said to himself. *Here we go.*

“Oh . . . my . . . *God*.”

“Please,” said Jack, softly.

“You’re Junior Jack Ryan.”

As far as Jack knew, he had never been called this by anyone in his life. He thought the girl might have been a little tongue-tied. He said, “That’s me. Junior Jack.”

“I don’t believe it!” Emily spoke louder this time, just below a shout. She started to turn back to her friend across the room, but Jack reached out and gently took hold of her forearm.

“Emily. *Please.* I’d appreciate you not making a big deal out of it.”

The redhead looked around the room quickly, then at Yalda, who was looking their way. Emily turned back to Jack and, with a conspiratorial nod, she said, “Right. I understand. No problem. Your secret’s safe with

me.”

“Thanks.” *Not in the mood,* Jack said to himself again, but he smiled.

Emily slipped into the booth, across from him.

Damn.

They talked for a few minutes; she asked him a dozen rapid-fire questions about his life and what he was doing here and how it was that he was all by himself without any protection. He responded with short answers; again, he wasn’t rude, he was simply trying to politely exude lack of interest from every pore of his body.

Emily had conspicuously not invited her friend to join them, but Jack saw a pair of men had ambled over to the olive-complexioned beauty sitting alone, and she was now in conversation herself.

He turned his attention back to Emily just as she said, “Jack . . . would it be forward of me to ask you if you’d like to go somewhere else where we can talk?”

Jack stifled yet another sigh. “Do you want an honest answer?”

“Well . . . sure.”

“Then . . . yeah. That *would* be pretty forward.”

The young woman was taken aback, not sure what to make of the American’s response. Before she could speak, Jack said, “I’m sorry. I’ve got a really early morning tomorrow.”

Emily said she understood, then told Jack to stay right where he was. She rushed back over to her table, grabbed her purse, and came back. She pulled out a business card and a pen, and began writing a number down.

Ryan took a sip of his lager and watched her.

“I hope you’ll give me a call when you aren’t busy. I’d love to show you around town. I was born and raised here, so you could do worse for a tour guide.”

“I’m sure.”

She handed Jack her card in an overt fashion that he knew was designed to show off for her friend, who was now sitting alone again. He took it with a forced smile, playing along for her benefit. She had, after all, played along with his ruse and not announced to the room he was the son of the President of the United States.

“Lovely to meet you, Jack.”

“Likewise.”

Emily reluctantly headed back to her table, and Jack worked on finishing his beer. He slipped her card into his coat; he would get home and then he would toss it onto a shelf with nearly a dozen other cards, napkins, and torn bits of envelopes, each one with the phone number of a female he’d met in similar circumstances in just two weeks here in the UK.

As he drank, Jack did not look toward Emily's table, but a few seconds later the redhead's friend shouted loud enough to be heard throughout the entire establishment, "No bleedin' way!"

Jack reached inside his coat for his wallet.

5

Two minutes later he was out on the sidewalk—they called it a pavement over here, which Jack found to be one of the more logical of all the discrepancies between British English and American English.

He walked alone through the night to the Bank underground station, oppressed by the feeling that he was being watched. It was just his nerves—he had no reason to suspect he was really being followed—but each time he was recognized by someone he didn't know his concerns grew that, despite his best intentions, he was continuing to expose those he cared about to danger.

He had come to the UK thinking he would slip into the fabric of the city unnoticed, but in his two weeks here at least a half-dozen people—in pubs, in the Tube station, or standing in line to buy fish and chips—had made it clear they knew exactly who he was.

Jack Ryan, Jr., was the same height as his world-famous father, and he possessed the same strong jaw and piercing blue eyes. He'd been on television when he was younger, but even though he'd done what he could to stay out of the public eye as much as possible in the past several years, he still looked enough like his younger self that he couldn't go anywhere without harboring concerns.

A few months earlier he had been working for The Campus when he learned Chinese intelligence knew something about who he was and what he really did for a living. This knowledge by the enemy compromised not only Ryan but also his friends and coworkers, and it also had the potential to compromise his father's administration.

So far the Chinese had not been a problem; Jack hoped his father's air strike on China had blown the hell out of anyone who could link him with intelligence work, but he suspected the real reason had more to do with the fact that the new leaders in Beijing were doing their best to make amends with the United States. That their motivations were economically based and not due to any new altruism on the part of the Chicoms did not diminish the fact that—for now, at least—the Chinese were playing nice.

And Jack knew his breakup with Melanie Kraft, his girlfriend of one year, had also contributed to his feeling of mistrust and unease. He'd met several women in the UK (the single females here didn't seem to have the shyness gene more common in U.S. women) and he'd been on a few dates, but he hadn't put enough distance between himself and Melanie yet to consider anything serious.

At times he wondered if a series of no-strings-attached one-night stands might cure him of his current malaise, but when push came to shove, he recognized that he wasn't really that type of guy. His parents must have raised him better, he surmised, and the thought of some asshole treating one of his sisters like a consumable product off the shelf made him ball his fists up in anger.

He'd come to face the fact that although he'd never had trouble attracting members of the opposite sex, he really wasn't cut out to be much of a Casanova.

Jack had come over here to the United Kingdom in the first place to put some distance between himself and The Campus after the leak. He expressed to the director of The Campus, Gerry Hendley, that he'd like to

take a few months to hone the analytical side of his work. He couldn't very well knock on the door at CIA or NSA without proper clearances, something Jack Ryan, Jr., would never be able to obtain, considering his clandestine work of the past few years. But Gerry knew how to think outside the box. He immediately suggested Jack delve into international business analytics, promising young Ryan that if he joined up with the right firm he would be thrown neck-deep into the world of government corruption, organized crime, drug cartels, and international terrorism.

That sounded just fine to Jack.

Gerry offered to make some introductions on Ryan's behalf, but Jack wanted to make his own way. He did some research into companies involved in business analysis, and he learned one of the biggest and best out there was a UK firm called Castor and Boyle Risk Analytics Ltd. From everything Ryan had read, C&B seemed to have its fingers in virtually every nook and cranny of the world of international finance.

Within a week of Ryan reaching out to Castor and Boyle, he was in London interviewing for a six-month contract position as a business analytics specialist.

Ryan made it clear in that first meeting with the co-owner of the firm, Colin Boyle, that he wanted no leg up due to his lineage. Moreover, he said if he was hired, he would do everything he could to downplay his identity, and he would ask the firm to respect his privacy and do the same.

Old boys' networks and college-chum nepotism were virtually the coin of the realm here in The City, so Boyle was both stunned and intrigued to discover that the son of the President of the United States sought to be nothing more than just another hardworking young analyst with a cubicle and a computer.

Boyle wanted to hire the lad on the spot for his laudable ethics, but he heeded young Ryan's wishes and had him sit for a daylong barrage of tests. Accounting, research methods, a personality questionnaire, and an in-depth survey of his knowledge of politics, current events, and geography. Ryan passed them all, he was offered the contract, and he returned to Baltimore only to shutter his condo and pack his bags.

Ten days later, Ryan reported for duty at Castor and Boyle.

He'd been on the job for two weeks now, and he had to admit he found his work here fascinating. Although he was a financial analyst, and not an intelligence analyst, he saw the work as two sides of the same coin, not two separate disciplines.

Castor and Boyle worked in a surprisingly cutthroat and fast-paced industry. While Colin Boyle was the better-known face of the company and the man who appeared in the media regarding C&B's work, the real operational force of the firm was led by Hugh Castor. Castor himself had served as a spymaster for UK domestic intelligence, MI5, during the Cold War, and he made the successful transition into the field of corporate security and business intelligence after leaving the government.

Others in the firm specialized in forensic accounting and the auditing of business ledgers, but at this early point in his assignment at Castor and Boyle, Ryan was more of a generalist.

This wasn't exactly the same as the analytical work he had done for The Campus. He wasn't digging through top-secret sensitive compartmented intelligence files to discern patterns in the movements of a terrorist, he was instead digging into the convoluted business relationships of shadowy front companies, trying to master the shell game of international business so that Castor and Boyle's clients could make informed decisions in the marketplace.

And he wasn't assassinating spies in Istanbul or targeting America's enemies in Pakistan, but nevertheless, he felt his work mattered, if only to the bottom line of his firm's clients.

Jack's short-term plan was to work very hard here in London, to learn everything he could about financial crime and forensic business analytics, and to stay away from Hendley Associates so as not to expose The Campus any more than he already had.

But again, that was in the short term. In the long term? In the long term, Jack wasn't really sure what he was doing. Where he would go. He wanted to return to The Campus when it was up and running again, but he didn't know when that would be.

When his father was Jack's age he had already served his country in the Marines, married, earned his doctorate, made a ton of money in the markets, written a book, and fathered a child.

Jack was proud of the things he had done for The Campus, but being the son of President Jack Ryan meant he would always have some incredibly large shoes to fill.

—

Ryan climbed out of the Tube at the Earl's Court station at 11:50 p.m. and made his way up to street level with the few other travelers out tonight. A steady rain had begun to fall, and as was often the case, Ryan had left his umbrella at the office. He grabbed a free newspaper from a rack at the station's exit and used it to cover his head as he crossed the street and entered the residential neighborhood.

Ryan strolled alone down the rainy street. On Hogarth Road he slowed, then turned and looked back over his shoulder. It was a habit he'd picked up working overseas with The Campus. He wouldn't perform an SDR, a surveillance-detection run; that would entail an hour or more of backtracking, changing his route, and using various forms of transportation. But he was, at least, keeping an eye out for any followers.

Jack had the presence of mind to alter his daily routine when possible. He made it a point to go to a different pub every evening after work, and with so many choices both in The City, where he worked, and here in Kensington, where he lived, he knew he could be here in town for months before he had trouble finding a new place.

As well as varying his nightspots, he also did what he could to change up the route he followed each night. The warren of streets in Kensington meant there were several ways he could get to and from his flat without always approaching from the same direction.

But even with these countermeasures, Jack couldn't shake the feeling he was being watched. He was unable to put his finger on it, and he had no evidence at all to confirm his suspicions, but some mornings on his predawn jog or during his commute from Kensington to The City, some afternoons out to lunch with his colleagues, and most evenings when he headed home on his own, he felt a prickly sensation and an almost palpable sense of eyes on him.

Was it the Chinese? Had they followed him here to London? Could it be British intelligence, just keeping an eye on him informally? Or might they have picked up a whiff of his former activities?

Could it even be the U.S. Secret Service, watching over him, making sure he was safe? Jack was the first child of a sitting U.S. President to refuse his Secret Service protection, a fact that had troubled many, and while they would have no mandate to protect him, he could not completely dismiss the possibility out of hand.

The more he wondered about the reasons for his sense he was being followed, the more he told himself it was nothing more than paranoia on his part.

He looked back over his shoulder again on Cromwell Road. Just like every other time he'd "checked his six," there was nothing there.

A few minutes later Jack turned onto Lexham Gardens, glanced at his watch, and saw it was past midnight. He'd have to fall right to sleep in order to get five full hours before rising for his morning run.

He entered his building, stopping in the doorway once more to see if he was being followed. As before, he saw no one.

It was just his imagination.

Perfect, Jack. When your dad was your age he was saving British royalty from IRA gunmen and commandeering Russian submarines. You can't even go out to a pub for a pint without getting the heebie-jeebies.

Shit, man. Get hold of yourself.

He'd taken some measures to keep a low profile since joining The Campus, but as he climbed the stairs to his flat, he realized his goal should be complete anonymity. He was far from home and alone, and the potential to redesign his physical presence was both possible and necessary.

He decided then and there he would grow a beard and mustache, he would cut his hair short, he would change the style of his clothing, he would even get back into the gym and bulk up to some degree.

His transformation would not happen overnight, he knew this, but he had to make it happen before he could truly relax and get on with his life.

6

Two months later

Dino Kadic sat behind the wheel of his Lada sedan, eyeing the row of luxury sport-utility vehicles parked on the far side of the square. A half-dozen BMWs, Land Cruisers, and Mercedeses idled nose to tail, and just beyond them, one of the city's most chic restaurants glowed in neon.

They were nice trucks, and it was a nice restaurant. But Kadic wasn't impressed.

He'd still blow the place to hell.

If he were anywhere else on earth the motorcade would have tipped him off that some serious VIP was having a late meal in that restaurant, but this was Moscow; around here, any self-respecting mob goon or reasonably well-connected businessman commanded his own fleet of high-dollar vehicles and crew of security men. The half-dozen fancy cars and the steel-eyed entourage protecting them did not prove to Kadic anyone of particular importance was dining inside; he figured it was probably just a local tough guy or a corrupt tax official.

His target tonight had arrived on foot; he was just some foreign businessman—important somewhere,

perhaps, but not important here. He was not an underworld personality or a politician. He was English, a high-flying emerging-markets fund manager named Tony Haldane. Kadic had gotten close visual confirmation of Haldane as he entered Vanil restaurant alone just after seven p.m., and then Kadic repositioned here, under a row of trees on the far side of the street. He parked his Lada at a meter on Gogolevsky Boulevard and sat behind the wheel, waiting with his phone in his lap and his eyes on the restaurant's front doors.

The cell phone resting on his leg was set to send a signal to the detonator in the shoebox-sized improvised explosive device under the leafy foliage in one of the planters sitting outside the front door of the restaurant.

Kadic watched from his position one hundred twenty meters away as the security men and drivers stood around the planter unaware, clueless to the danger.

He doubted any of those guys would survive the blast. And he could not possibly care less.

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel—from nerves, not from boredom—and felt his heartbeat increase as the minutes ticked off. Despite how long Dino had been doing this sort of thing, each time brought the adrenaline rush anew. The battle of wits that came along with devising and orchestrating and executing an assassination, the anticipation of the explosion, the smell of burning accelerant and plastic and, yes, even flesh.

Kadic first felt the thrill twenty years earlier when he was a young Croatian paramilitary fighting in the war in the Balkans. When Croatia signed its truce with Serbia, Kadic realized he was having too much fun with the war, and he wasn't ready to stop fighting, so he organized a mercenary para unit that conducted raids into Bosnia, targeting Serbian Army patrols for the Bosnian government. The CIA took interest in the group, and they gave Kadic and his men training and equipment.

It did not take long for the Agency to realize they had made a huge mistake. Kadic's Croatian paramilitary force was implicated in atrocities against Serbian civilians living in Bosnia, and the CIA broke ties with Dino Kadic and his men.

After the war ended, Kadic began plying his trade as a contract killer. He worked in the Balkans and in the Middle East, and then, around the turn of the millennium, he moved to Russia, where he became a killer-for-hire for any underworld entity that would employ him.

He did well for himself in the industry for a few years and then bought property back in Croatia, where he settled into semiretirement, living mostly off the money he'd made in Russia over the past decade, although from time to time a contract came his way that he could not refuse.

Like this Haldane hit. The contractor, a Russian underworld personality, had offered a princely sum for what Kadic determined to be a low-risk operation. The Russian had been very specific as to the time and the place of the hit, and he'd told Kadic he wanted to make a big and bold statement.

Nyet problem, Dino had told the man at the time. He could do big and bold.

He calmed himself with a slow breath, told himself to relax.

A phrase, in English, had been taught to him by the Americans a long time ago, and he said it aloud now.

"Stay frosty."

It had become a ritual in those quiet moments before the noise of a mission, and it made him feel good to say

it. He hated the Americans now; they had turned on him, deemed him unreliable, but they could not take back the training they had given him.

And he was about to put this training to use.

Dino glanced at his watch and then squinted across the dark square toward the target area. He did not use binoculars; there was too great a chance someone walking past his parked car or even looking out a window in one of the nearby apartments or shops would notice the man in the car with the binos pointed precisely at the location where the bomb would soon detonate. Any description at all of his car to investigators after the blast would cause the Interior Ministry to search hours of security-camera footage of the area, and soon enough he would be identified.

That would not do. Dino aimed to get out of this op clean, and this meant he'd have to eyeball it from distance. The people who hired him for this job ordered him to make an angry statement with his explosive, so the bomb was constructed with overkill in mind. For this reason Dino had positioned himself back a little farther from his target than he would have liked.

From this distance he would have to ID his target from the color of his camel coat as he left the building, and, Dino decided, that would do just fine.

He checked his watch yet again.

"Stay frosty," he said again in English, and then he switched to his native Serbo-Croatian. Hurry up, damn it!

—

Inside Vanil, a cordon of four bodyguards in black suits stood in front of a red curtain separating the private banquet area from the dining room, and although the locals in the restaurant were accustomed to plainclothes security men all over this most insecure city, a cursory look at this protection detail would indicate these were top-of-the-line bodyguards, not the much more common cheap "rent-a-thug" variety.

Behind the armed guards and behind the curtain, two middle-aged men sipped brandies at a table in the center of the large, otherwise empty room.

One of the men wore a Burberry suit in gray flannel. The knot of his blue tie was as tight and proper now as it had been at eight that morning. In English, but with a thick Russian accent, the man said, "Moscow has always been a dangerous place. In the past few months I'm afraid it has only become exponentially more so."

Across the table, British subject Anthony Haldane was as nicely dressed as the Russian. His Bond Street blue pin-striped suit was fresh and pressed, and his camel coat hung from a rack nearby. He smiled, surprised by the comment. "These are troubling words coming from the nation's security chief."

Instead of giving a quick response, Stanislav Biryukov sipped his *chacha*, a Georgian brandy made from distilled grape skins. After wiping his mouth with the corner of his napkin, he said, "SVR is Russia's *foreign* security service. Things are going relatively well in foreign environs at the moment. The FSB, internal security, is the organization presiding over the current catastrophe, both in Russia and in the nations adjacent to Russia."

Haldane said, "You'll excuse me for not making the immediate distinction between FSB and SVR. To an old hand like me, it is all still the KGB."

Biryukov smiled. “And to an older hand, we would all be Chekists.”

Haldane chuckled. “Quite so, but that one is even before my time, old boy.”

Biryukov held his glass up to the candlelight; he regarded the deep golden color of the liquid before carefully choosing his next words. “As a foreigner you might not know it, but FSB has authority not just over Russia but also over the other nations in the Commonwealth of Independent States, even though our neighbors are sovereign nations. We refer to the border nations as ‘the near abroad.’”

Haldane cocked his head. He pretended not to know it, and Biryukov pretended he believed Haldane’s lie. The Russian added, “It can get a bit confusing, I will allow.”

Haldane said, “There is something off about Russian internal security operating in its former republics. Almost as if someone forgot to tell the spies that the Soviet Union is no more.”

Biryukov did not reply.

Haldane knew the SVR director had some objective by inviting him out for drinks tonight, but for now the Russian was playing his cards close to his vest. Every comment was calculated. The Englishman tried to draw him out. “Does it feel like they are operating on your turf?”

Biryukov laughed aloud. “FSB is welcome to those nations. My work in Paris and Tokyo and Toronto is a delight compared to what they have to do in Grozny and Almaty and Minsk. These are ugly days for our sister service.”

“Might I infer that is what you wanted to talk to me about?”

Biryukov answered the question with a question of his own: “How long have we known each other, Tony?”

“Since the late eighties. You were stationed at the Soviet embassy in London, as a cultural attaché, and I was with the Foreign Office.”

Biryukov corrected him on both counts. “I was KGB and you were British intelligence.”

Haldane looked like he was going to protest, but only for a moment. “Would there be any point in me denying it?”

The Russian said, “We were children back then, weren’t we?”

“Indeed we were, old chap.”

Biryukov leaned in a little closer. “I mean to cause you no consternation, my friend, but I know you retain a relationship with your government.”

“I am one of Her Majesty’s loyal subjects, if that is what you mean to say.”

“*Nyet.* That is *not* what I mean to say.”

Haldane’s eyebrows rose. “Is the director of Russian foreign intelligence accusing me of being a foreign spy in the capital of Russia?”

Biryukov leaned back from the table. “No need to be dramatic. It is quite natural that you have kept up old

friendships in MI6. A little back-and-forth between a well-connected businessman like yourself and your nation's spy shop is nothing at all but smart business practice for both parties."

So that *is the game,* Haldane thought, with some relief. Stan wanted to reach out to British intelligence using his old friend as a cutout.

It makes sense, Haldane thought, as he drained his glass. It would not do for the head of SVR to pop around to the British embassy for a chat.

Haldane said, "I have some friends well positioned within MI6, yes, but please, don't give me too much credit. I have been out of the service for a long time. I can pass along any message you want me to convey, but the clearer you can make things for me, the less chance I will have of mucking the whole thing up."

Biryukov poured both men another snifter of *chacha*. "Very well. I will make things very clear. I am here tonight to inform you, to inform the United Kingdom, that there is a push by our president to reunite our two intelligence services, to reestablish an umbrella organization above both foreign and domestic security." He added, "I think this is a very bad idea."

The Englishman nearly spit out his brandy. "He wants to reboot the KGB?"

"I find it hard to believe the Kremlin, even the Kremlin of President Valeri Volodin, would be so brazen as to call the new organization by the title Komitet Bezopasnosti, but the role of the new organization will be virtually that of the old. One organization in charge of all intelligence matters, both foreign and domestic."

Haldane mumbled, almost to himself, "Bloody hell."

Biryukov nodded somberly. "It will serve no positive function."

This seemed, to Haldane, to be a gross understatement.

"Then why do it?"

"There is a quickening of events, both domestically in Russia and in the former republics. Since the unsuccessful attack on Estonia a couple of months ago, President Volodin and his people are increasing Russia's sphere of influence on all fronts. He wants more power and control in the former satellite nations. If he can't take power and control with tanks, he will take it with spies."

Haldane knew this because it was all over the news. In the past year the nations of Belarus, Chechnya, Kazakhstan, and Moldova had all elected staunchly pro-Russian and anti-Western governments. In each and every case Russia had been accused of meddling in the elections, either politically or by using their intelligence services or those in the criminal underworld to affect the outcomes to Moscow's advantage.

Discord, in large part fueled by Moscow, was the order of the day in several other bordering nations; the invasion of Estonia was unsuccessful, but there remained the threat of invasion in Ukraine. In addition to this, a near–civil war in Georgia, bitterly disputed presidential campaigns in Latvia and Lithuania, riots and protests in other nearby countries.

Biryukov continued, "Roman Talanov, my counterpart in the FSB, is leading this charge. I suppose with complete control over Russian intelligence activity abroad, he can expand his influence and begin destabilizing nations beyond the near abroad. Russia will invade Ukraine, probably within the next few weeks. They will annex the Crimea. From there, if they meet no resistance from the West, they will take more of the country, all the way to the Dnieper River. Once this is achieved, I believe Volodin will set his

eyes on making beneficial alliances from a position of power, both in the other border countries and in the former nations of the Warsaw Pact. He believes he can return the entire region to the central control of the Kremlin. Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania. They will be the next dominoes to fall."

Biryukov drank, but Haldane's mouth had gone dry. This was talk of a new Cold War at the very least, and it certainly could lead to a new hot war. But the Englishman had known the Russian long enough to know the man was not prone to exaggeration.

Haldane asked, "If Talanov takes over SVR's responsibilities, what will they do with you, Stan?"

"I am concerned about our fragile democracy. I am worried about the freedom of the Russian people. I am worried about a dangerous overreach that could lead to a broad war with the West." He smiled with a shrug. "I am not worried about my future employment prospects."

He added, "I will have more information for you soon. You and I have both developed sources before. It takes time."

Haldane laughed in surprise. "You want to be *my* agent?"

The director of the SVR leaned over the table. "I come cheaper than most. I want nothing in return except comfort in the fact the West will do anything it can, politically speaking, of course, to thwart the FSB's attempt to increase their hold on my nation's foreign security service. If you publicize this internationally, it might have a cooling effect on Talanov and Volodin's plans."

Haldane caught himself wondering about the impact this news would have on his investments in Europe. He was, after all, a businessman first and foremost. But he cleared his head of business and did his best to remember his past life in the intelligence field.

He found this hard to do; he had not worked as an employee of MI6 in nearly two decades. He put his hands up in the air in a show of surrender. "I . . . I really am out of the game, my friend. Of course I can return to London straightaway and talk to some old acquaintances, and then they will find someone more appropriate to serve as a conduit for your information in the future."

"*You*, Tony. I will only talk to you."

Haldane nodded slowly. "I understand." He thought for a moment. "I have business here, next week. Can we meet again?"

"Yes, but after that we will need to automate the flow of information."

"Quite. I don't suppose it would do for us to have a regular date night."

Stanislav smiled. "I will warn you now. My wife is every bit as dangerous as FSB director Roman Talanov."

"I rather doubt *that*, old boy."

7

President of the United States Jack Ryan stood outside the White House's South Portico with his wife, Cathy, by his side and his Secret Service contingent flanking them both. It was a crisp spring afternoon in

D.C., with bright blue skies and temperatures in the low forties, and as Ryan watched a black Ford Expedition roll up the driveway he could not help thinking this great weather would make for a nice photo op here with his guest on the South Lawn.

But there would be no photos today, nor would the meeting go in the visitor log kept by the White House. The President's official schedule, put online for all the world to see, for reasons Ryan could not fathom, was cryptic regarding Ryan's activities today. It said only, "Private Lunch—Residence. 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m."

And if Scott Adler, the secretary of state, had his way, this meeting would not be happening at all.

But Ryan was President of the United States, and, on this, POTUS got his way. His visitor today was his friend, he was in town, and Ryan saw no reason why he shouldn't have him over for lunch.

As they waited for the Expedition to come to a stop, Cathy Ryan leaned closer to her husband. "This guy pointed a gun at you once, didn't he?"

There was *that*, Ryan conceded to himself.

With a sly smile he replied, "I'm sorry, hon. That's classified. Anyway, you know Sergey. He's a friend."

Cathy pinched her husband's arm playfully, and her next comment was delivered in jest. "They've searched him, right?"

"Cathy." Ryan said it in a mock scolding voice, and then he joked, "Hell . . . I hope so."

Ryan's lead personal protection agent, Andrea Price-O'Day, was standing close enough to hear the exchange. "If it comes down to it, Mr. President, I think you could take him."

The Expedition parked in front of them, and one of the Secret Service agents opened the back door.

Seconds later, Sergey Golovko, former officer in the KGB and former director of Russia's foreign intelligence service, climbed slowly out of the vehicle.

"Sergey!" Ryan said, his smile warm and his hand outstretched.

"Mr. President," Golovko replied with a smile of his own.

Cathy came forward and accepted a kiss; she'd met Sergey before and thought him to be a kind and gentle man, despite whatever had happened between him and Jack a long time ago.

As they turned to head back into the White House, Ryan could not help noticing that Sergey seemed noticeably older than he had the last time the two had met. Though he smiled, he moved slowly and sluggishly, and his shoulders hung slumped inside his blue suit.

Ryan told himself this should not come as a great surprise. Statistically, the life expectancy of a Russian male was around sixty, and Sergey was over seventy. On top of this, Golovko had been traveling on a grueling speaking tour here in the United States for the past two weeks. Why shouldn't the man look a little the worse for wear?

Face it, Jack, he thought, *we're all getting old.*

As the entourage walked through the Diplomatic Reception Room on its way to the staircase to the second

floor, Jack put his hand on the back of the smaller Russian. “How are you, my friend?”

“I’m well,” Sergey answered as he walked. And then he added with a shrug, “I woke up this morning a bit under the weather. Last night in Lawrence, Kansas, I ate something called a barbecue brisket. Apparently, even my iron Russian stomach was not prepared for this.”

Ryan chuckled, put his arm around his old friend. “I’m sorry to hear that. We have a great physician on staff here. I can have her come up and talk to you before lunch if you would like.”

Sergey shook his head politely. “*Nyet.* I will be okay. Thank you, Ivan Emmetovich.” He caught himself quickly, “I mean, Mr. President.”

“Ivan Emmetovich is fine, Sergey Nikolayevich. I appreciate the honorific of my father.”

—

Anthony Haldane and Stanislav Biryukov stood in the lobby of Vanil restaurant chatting while donning their coats. As they prepared to leave, the SVR director’s principal protection agent radioed to the street to have Biryukov’s Land Rover pulled up to the door.

The men shook hands. “Until next week, Anthony Arturovich.”

“*Da svidaniya*, Stan.”

Tony Haldane exited the doors along with one of Biryukov’s security men, who headed out in advance of his principal to check the street. Stanislav himself stood in the doorway, surrounded by three bodyguards, waiting for the all-clear.

As Haldane stepped to the curb behind the row of SUVs to hail a taxi, Biryukov was ushered out the door, twenty-five feet behind the Englishman. He had just stepped between the two planters bracing Vanil’s doorway when a flash of light enveloped the entire scene.

In microseconds a thunderclap of sound and pressure rocked the neighborhood.

The explosion threw security men like debris into the street, the armored Range Rovers jolted or rolled over like Matchbox cars, and projectiles from the explosion shattered window glass and injured passersby one hundred meters away. Dozens of car alarms erupted in bleats and wails, drowning out all but the loudest moans of pain and screams of shock.

On the far side of the park, Dino Kadic sat back up in his Lada. He had knelt down, almost to the floorboard, to press the send button on his phone while out of the direct line of any shrapnel, though his sedan was mostly shielded by the corner of a bank building.

Before the last bit of debris from the blast had rained back to earth, Kadic started his car and pulled out into light evening traffic. He drove off slowly and calmly, without a look back at the devastation, although he did roll his window down slightly as he left the scene, taking in a deep breath of the smoke already hanging in the air.

—

President Jack Ryan and First Lady Cathy Ryan sat down with their guest for lunch in the Family Residence dining room on the second floor of the White House, just across the West Sitting Hall from the master

bedroom. Joining them for lunch was the director of national intelligence, Mary Pat Foley, and her husband, former director of the CIA, Ed Foley.

Having the former head of Russia's security services over for lunch in the White House's private dining room was somewhat surreal to the small group of those who both knew about today's luncheon and remembered the Cold War, but times had changed in many ways.

Golovko was no longer a member of Russia's intelligence service—in fact, he was much the opposite. He was a private citizen now, and proving to be a thorn in the side of the current occupant of the Kremlin. The State Department had warned President Ryan it would be perceived as provocative by the Russians if they knew Golovko was coming to the White House for lunch. Jack acquiesced reluctantly, and only partially; he ordered the event to remain informal and to be kept below the radar.

Sergey Golovko had retired from intelligence work three years earlier, and almost immediately he made headlines in Russia because he, unlike most intelligence chiefs, did not go into politics or business. To the contrary, Golovko took his small pension and began speaking out against the *siloviki*—a Russian term used to denote members of the intelligence community and the military who became high-ranking and powerful political leaders. The Kremlin had become filled to capacity with ex-spies and ex–military officers, and they worked together as a tightly knit coalition in order to gain and hold power, using the skills they learned controlling the security services to now control every aspect of public and private life.

The new man in charge at the Kremlin, sixty-year-old Valeri Volodin, was himself a member of the *siloviki*, having worked for years in the FSB and, previous to this, as a young officer in the KGB. Most current members of the executive and legislative bodies were former members of either the internal or foreign intelligence service, or military intelligence (the GRU).

As Golovko began publicly airing his displeasure with the policies and practices of the Volodin administration, Volodin did not take kindly to the ex–SVR man's comments, especially those critical of the rollback of democratic institutions by the new regime. As a fervent opponent of the *siloviki*, Golovko knew it was just a matter of time before his own safety was at risk. Old colleagues of Golovko's still in the SVR warned the ex–spy chief it would be in his best interest to leave Russia and not look back.

With a heavy heart, the former SVR head exiled himself from his motherland and moved to London, where, for the past year, he'd lived modestly enough, though he continued to criticize Volodin and his ministers. His speaking tours took him all over the globe, and he could be seen on television somewhere on the planet almost every week, appearing in interviews and roundtable discussions.

Ryan looked across the table at Golovko now and could not help wondering how someone who looked so frail could keep up a schedule nearly as arduous as his own.

Golovko saw the look, and he smiled at Ryan. "Ivan Emmetovich, tell me, how are your children?"

"Everyone is fine. Katie and Kyle are at school here in D.C. Sally is at Johns Hopkins, finishing up her residency."

"Three doctors in the family. Very impressive," Sergey said, tipping his wineglass to both Ryans.

Jack chuckled. "Three docs, but only two physicians. As a doctor of history, I've noticed my specialty is not as useful as an M.D. in a house full of kids."

"And what is Junior up to these days?" Sergey asked.

“Actually, Jack Junior is over in your neck of the woods. He moved to London just two months ago.”

“Is that so?” Golovko said with mild surprise. “What is he doing there?”

“He is working in the business analytics field for a private firm. Spending his days evaluating corporate buyouts and international finance deals.”

“Ah, he’s in The City, then.”

“He is, but he’s living in Earl’s Court.”

With a smile, Sergey said, “He got his father’s brains. He should have become an intelligence officer.”

The President took a bite of his salad, careful to give nothing away.

Cathy Ryan interjected, “One spook in the family is enough, don’t you think?”

Sergey held his water glass up to her. “Of course. It is a difficult career. Difficult for the family, as well. I am sure having young Jack work in a safe and secure profession is a great comfort to you.”

Cathy sipped her iced tea. “Very much so.”

Jack thought his wife’s poker face was much better than his own.

Sergey added, “I’d love to see him. I live not far from Earl’s Court, in Notting Hill. Perhaps young Ivan Ivanovich could find time to have dinner with me some evening.”

“I’m sure he would like that,” Ryan replied.

“Don’t worry. I will not tell him too many old war stories.”

“My son wouldn’t believe you, anyway.”

The room erupted in laughter. Of those present, only Ed and Mary Pat knew the full history between the two men. Cathy was having a hard time imagining the aged Russian ever having been a threat to her husband.

The talk turned to Ed and Mary Pat, and their time in Moscow in the eighties. They talked about their fondness for the country, the people, and the customs.

Ryan ate his lunch, his eyes still across the table on Sergey. He imagined his old friend would probably much rather be drinking vodka instead of sipping iced tea, and eating borscht instead of pork tenderloin. Although his fork had poked and prodded his plate, Jack didn’t think he’d eaten a bite.

Cathy asked Sergey about his speaking tour, and this seemed to perk him up considerably. He’d been to nearly a dozen cities across the United States in the past two weeks, and he had something nice to say about every one. He’d been speaking about what he saw as the corrupt administration of Valeri Volodin, mostly at universities, and he also had a book in the works to pound the message home even further.

On that subject, Ed Foley said, “Sergey, we’re a year into Valeri Volodin’s first term. Just yesterday Volodin signed a new decree whereby he is allowed to handpick the governors throughout Russia’s eighty-three regions. It looks, to an old hand like me, as if the rollback of democracy is picking up steam.”

Golovko replied, “From Volodin’s point of view, it makes sense for him to do this.”

“How so?”

“Regional elections are coming up later in the year. There was always the chance, small though it may be, that the population would elect someone whose loyalty to the central government was in question. It is Volodin’s goal to control everything from Moscow. Putting his own people in charge in the eighty-three regions will help him do that.”

Mary Pat asked, “Where do you see democracy in Russia at the end of Volodin’s first term?”

Golovko took a long sip of ice water. He said, “President Volodin explains away his iron fist by saying, ‘Russia has a *special democracy*.’ This is his reference to the fact he controls most of the media, handpicks governors, and throws businessmen in jail who he feels don’t keep the interests of the Kremlin in mind with every business decision they make.” Golovko shook his head slowly in disgust. Ryan saw a sheen of perspiration glisten through his thin white hair. “A *special democracy*. Russia’s special democracy is more commonly known around the world by another name. Dictatorship.”

There were nods of agreement all around.

“What is happening in Russia is not about government. It is about crime. Volodin and his cronies have billions of dollars of interests in Gazprom, the government natural-gas concern, and Rosneft, the oil concern, as well as minority ownership and total control over banks and shipping and timber concerns. They are raping the country of its wealth and natural resources, and they are using the power of the Kremlin to do it. After three more years of Volodin and his *siloviki* in power, I am afraid what is left of Russia’s democracy will only be a memory. This is no exaggeration on my part. Central power is a snowball that picks up snow as it rolls downhill. It will get bigger and bigger, and it will move faster and faster. In a few years there will be no one able to stop it.”

“Why do the people stand for it?” Cathy asked.

“The social contract in Russia is very simple. The population is willing to give up liberty and turn a blind eye to government corruption in exchange for security and prosperity. This worked as long as there was security and prosperity, but it is failing now.

“I was there, in 1990. A pensioner who normally took a hundred rubles to the market for groceries suddenly learned he would need one-point-six million rubles to buy the same amount of goods. Shopkeepers basically had the job of telling people they were going to starve to death.

“The Russians are happy those days are gone. Volodin is a dictator, but most see him as a protector. Having said that, the economy is turning and the demographics in Russia are changing, and not in his favor. Birthrate amongst the Slavs in all nations has been in the negative level for nearly two decades. As the iron fist squeezes harder, and the transfer of Russia’s resources leaves Russia and bankrupts the nation, more and more people will start to notice its pressure.”

Sergey Golovko began coughing for a moment, but it subsided and he wiped his mouth with his napkin before saying, “The failure of the existing social contract in Russia will not lead to a new social contract, it will only lead to Volodin removing more and more freedoms.”

Jack Ryan said, “Benjamin Franklin put it like this: ‘Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.’”

Golovko regarded the quote for a moment. “If this man said this in Moscow he would be hauled into Lefortovo and questioned by the FSB.”

Jack smiled. Either Golovko did not know who Benjamin Franklin was, or else he’d just forgotten. He said, “Franklin made that comment two hundred fifty years ago, when our republic was going through a trying time.”

Mary Pat said, “My concerns about Volodin are not just on the domestic front. Recent events in the former republics have the Kremlin’s fingerprints all over them.”

“Roman Talanov’s intelligence services and Valeri Volodin’s strong-arm tactics have created a vast region of client states.”

Ryan said, “The Commonwealth of Independent States aren’t so independent anymore.”

Golovko nodded animatedly at this, took another long sip of water, and used his napkin again, this time to dab sweat off his brow. “Very true. They have meddled in elections, bought and threatened leaders and influential people, undermined opposition groups.

“Belarus, Georgia, Moldova . . . they are effectively satellites once again. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan never left the fold. Others are teetering. We saw what happened in Estonia when one of Russia’s neighbors did not do what Moscow wanted it to do. If it had not been for you, Ivan Emmetovich, Estonia would be a vassal state, and Lithuania and Latvia would fall as well.”

Ryan corrected him politely: “Not me, Sergey. NATO.”

Golovko shook his head. “You led the way. Europe did not want to fight, but you convinced them.”

That had been a sore subject around the White House. Ryan just gave a slight nod and sipped his tea.

Mary Pat asked, “What are your thoughts on the conflict in Ukraine?”

“Ukraine is a special case, partially due to its size. Ten times as large as Georgia, and it has a huge population of citizens who align their family history with Russia, not with Ukraine. It is a Slavic nation as well. It is forgotten by many in the West that the Slavic nations of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia share a common heritage. Volodin clearly wants to unite them as one for historical reasons, and he wants to control the other former republics as a buffer from the West.”

Ed Foley said, “When Ukraine started talking about joining NATO there were grumblings from Russia, of course, but only when Volodin came to power last year did the real threats begin.”

Sergey began coughing again. When he stopped, he tried to laugh off the coughing fit. “Excuse me. I get excited when the topic is Valeri Volodin.”

Most in the room chuckled politely. Dr. Cathy Ryan, on the other hand, wasn’t laughing. She’d been noting Golovko’s pale skin and increasing perspiration. “Sergey, we have a doctor on staff here. If you like I can have Maura come up after lunch and take a look at you, just to make sure you are okay.” She spoke in the same polite but professional manner in which she addressed the parents of her patients. She had her point of view on the matter, and she wanted to get it across, but she did not push.

“Thank you very much for the offer, Cathy, but I’ll return to the UK tonight and visit my physician in London tomorrow if the stomach pains continue.” He smiled weakly, obviously in some discomfort. “I am

sure I will feel much better by the morning."

Cathy let it go with a look that indicated she was not satisfied. Jack noticed the look, and he knew this would not be the end of the discussion.

Poor Sergey, he thought.

But Golovko was more concerned about the subject under discussion than his own health. "Yes, Edward. The Russians are afraid of a Ukrainian pivot back to the West and away from their sphere of influence. Volodin was furious that the nationalists retook control of the country. He fears they will join NATO, and he knows that once that happens, the West will have to fight to protect them."

Golovko added, "Volodin has his eyes on the Crimea, in southern Ukraine, and he knows once Ukraine joins NATO, that will be difficult for him to achieve. The way he sees it, he has to move soon."

Ryan said, "He is right that there is no treaty between Ukraine and NATO. And if he does invade, getting Europe on board to fight for the Crimea is a nonstarter."

Golovko waved a hand in the air. "Europe wants their oil and their natural gas, and Russia supplies it. They have been kowtowing to Moscow for a long time."

"To be fair," Ryan countered, "they *need* their oil and their natural gas. I might not like it, but keeping Russia happy is in their interests."

"That may well be, but as Russia moves closer and closer to them by installing puppet after puppet in Eastern and Central European nations, the NATO states will have less mobility on the issue than before. They should exert their leverage against Moscow while they still have a little left."

Ryan agreed with Sergey, but this problem had been growing for years, and he knew it would not be settled over lunch.

—

After a dessert of assorted sorbets that Sergey did not touch, Mary Pat and Ed said their good-byes, and Jack and Cathy invited the Russian across the hall to the Yellow Oval Room, a formal parlor Cathy liked to use for private receptions.

On the way, Golovko excused himself to go to the restroom, and Jack led him to the bathroom off the living room. As soon as he stepped back into the hall, Cathy approached him.

Softly, she said, "He is ill."

"Yeah, he said he ate something that didn't agree with him."

Cathy made a face. "It looks worse than that. I don't know how you are going to do it, but I want you to talk him into letting Maura take a look at him before he goes to the airport."

"Not sure how—"

"I am confident you can charm him. I'm really worried, Jack. I think he's really sick."

"What do you think is wrong?" Jack was taken aback.

“I don’t know, but he needs to get checked out. Today, not tomorrow.”

“I’ll try to persuade him, but he always was a tough son of a bitch.”

“There’s tough, and then there’s foolish. I need you to remind him he is a smart guy.”

Ryan nodded, acquiescing to his wife. He was President of the United States, but he was also a dutiful husband, and as much as anything, he didn’t want Cathy haranguing *him* about Sergey for the rest of the afternoon.

8

Dino Kadic made it back to his rented room thirty minutes after the bombing, pulled a beer from his refrigerator, and flipped on the television. He needed to pack, but it could wait for the length of time it would take him to have a dark Yarpivo. He would leave Moscow by train first thing in the morning, but for now he would take a few minutes to enjoy himself a little and watch the news coverage of his operation.

He did not have to wait long. After only a few sips he saw the first images from the scene: shattered glass and fires burning at the front of the restaurant. The camera moved to the left and panned past several SUVs scattered and tossed on the street; beyond them was the domed Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the flashing lights of emergency vehicles reflecting off the windows.

Kadic leaned back on the sofa, enraptured by the beauty of the chaos he created.

An attractive female reporter, just on the scene, seemed utterly shocked by the carnage around her. She lifted her microphone to her mouth and struggled to find words.

Kadic smiled while she went into the few details of the bombing available to her. Mostly she just stammered and detailed the devastation with poorly chosen adjectives.

After a minute of this, though, she brought her hand up to her ear and stopped talking suddenly, as she listened to a producer on her earpiece.

And then her eyes went wide.

“Is this confirmed? Can I say this on air?” She waited for a reply in her earpiece, and Kadic wondered what was going on. With a quick nod, the reporter said, “We have just been told that the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Stanislav Arkadyevich Biryukov, was leaving the restaurant at the exact moment of the explosion, and has been injured. His condition is presently unknown.”

Kadic lowered the beer bottle slowly and stared at the screen. A less cynical man might have taken the first news reports about the Vanil bombing as some sort of error. *Surely* she was mistaken. Incorrect information from stand-up reporting in the first minutes on a scene like this was the rule, not the exception.

But decades of work with intelligence agencies and mafia groups had made Dino Kadic nothing if not cynical. As soon as he heard Biryukov had been on the sidewalk at the moment the bomb detonated, he took the report as accurate, and he knew it was no coincidence.

He’d been set up. The contractor of the Haldane hit had instructed him on the time and location of the bombing, and had demanded more explosive be used to increase the blast radius. Whoever had done this had

orchestrated Kadic's operation to take out the real target, the head of the SVR.

"Picku matirinu!" It was Serbo-Croatian, akin to "Oh, fuck," but even more profane.

And Dino Kadic knew something else. The people who set him up like this wouldn't think twice about sending someone to silence him, so he could take the fall without being able to bring anyone else down with him.

As he sat there on the little sofa in his rented flat, he was sure.

It wasn't *if* they would come for him . . . It was *when*.

And Kadic, being the cynic that he was, didn't give himself much time. He would pack in sixty seconds and be down in his car in one hundred twenty seconds.

"Stay frosty." He threw the beer bottle at the TV and leapt to his feet, began collecting his most important belongings and throwing them into a rolling duffel.

—

As a pair of dark green ZiL-130 truck-buses pulled up to the entrance of an apartment building on Gruzinskiy Val Street, the back door of each vehicle opened. In a matter of seconds, twenty-four members of the 604th Red Banner Special Purpose Center leapt to the pavement. They were Interior Ministry troops, some of the best trained and most elite in the Russian police force. To those walking by on the sidewalk on Gruzinskiy Val, the men looked like futuristic robots in their black body armor, black Nomex balaclavas, and smoked Plexiglas visors.

Eight men remained at ground level, while two teams of eight took the two stairwells up to the fourth floor. As they ascended, they held their AK-74 rifles against their shoulders and pointed them just offset of the man in front of them in the stack.

On the fourth floor they left the stairwells. A few apartment owners opened their doors in the hallway and found themselves staring down teams of masked and visored men with assault rifles. The residents quickly shut their doors, and several turned up the volume on their televisions to shield themselves from any knowledge of whatever the hell was going on.

The Red Banner men converged outside room 409, and the team leader moved up the train, positioning himself just behind the breacher.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Velma Cain:

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